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March 19, 1944 — Budapest, Hungary

That was the date Germany invaded Hungary. It was a Sunday and we saw the German army, mighty in their tanks and hardware, marching on Budapest and Ujpest Streets. In April, we were in the ghetto of Ujpest. There were lots of big buildings with lots of individual apartments in Ujpest. Where we lived, Arpad ut 5, became also a ghetto house. My husband's relatives moved in with me. (My husband was in a labor camp in Hungary.) But, also, other people, strangers moved in. There was one kitchen, one bathroom for all of us, but somehow we managed. We only could leave the house at certain times from 10 a.m. 'til 3 p.m. As for myself, I went every morning to our small sheet-metal factory and came home later in the afternoon. Our small factory was working for the big sheet metal one in Csepel, I believe it was called, at that time, Weiss Manfred.

On June 29 (Peter - Paul day) the ghetto house was locked. Next morning the zsandars with their rooster-feathered hats came and

according to their orders, everybody had to go down in the courtyard. Accordingly, we had to take with us some food and in our backpacks items we wanted to take with us. (I only took a sweater, my ski boots and a book, toothbrush, etc.) Then we marched out of the house.* Our new destinations was an abandoned big, brick factory somewhere in the suburbs. When we arrived, there were already thousands and thousands of people from Kispest, etc. from the neighboring cities.

*The streets of Ujpest were full of people watching us marching. (There were some people crying, but some were laughing and cheering. That was my last memory of Ujpest.)

After one day at this large camp, cattle cars arrived on the tracks and the deportations began. Needless to describe the situation in the cattle cars perhaps only to that we did not have water to drink (it was summer) we only had one bucket for our waste which we had to empty through the window and when we arrived to Auschwitz there were also dead people among us.

*The name of Auschwitz was originally Oswiezim because it was in Poland which in September 1939 became occupied by Germany. Above the gate we went through was the following inscription: "Arbeit macht frei." (Work makes you free!)

Arriving to Auschwitz, on the dirt we saw women walking like zombies. We thought first that they are gypsies. A short time later we also looked like them.

*After our arrival, a very elegant German officer divided our group; one part went left, the other right. As we learned later, he was the infamous Dr. Mengele. Then we had to go into the showers where our heads were shaved, our clothes, shoes, etc. taken away. Instead, we got rags and wooden clogs. Then we went to "our" barracks.

*The Polish girls who were there since a couple of years told us and showed us the chimneys of the crematoriums and telling that we'll finish our lives there. (First, we did not want to believe this.) This was Camp C."

Auschwitz had a terrible climate; during the day it was sizzling hot; at night very cold. The daily routine was to get up at night (3 or 4 o'clock a.m.) and we had to stand for hours or stand for the whole day to be counted. This was called "Zehlappel". Once or twice a week, we had to go to Birkenau (neighboring camp) for showers, but we never knew whether we would get water or gas!

I was in Auschwitz until the end of August. Then there was a big selection (all selections were done in the nude) from different barracks, (and a big air battle above us between the Luftwaffe and Russian airplanes). Then we were put in the cattle cars and off we went. A few days later, our group arrived to Frankfurt am Main. There was a big forest with lots of barracks that was our new "home". As I spoke perfect German, I became an interpreter and also worked in the Revier (hospital). Here we had bunk beds, straw mattresses and horse-blankets. ("*Improvement*" from Auschwitz.)

I was together with my sister-in-law, her 18-year-old daughter and some friends from Ujpest. The camp commander was a Nazi

officer. We also had 3 women officers who were much nastier and crueler than the men. There were also so called Frei Arbciters. who came to work in the camp. As I could talk to them, they brought me German newspapers and brochures. This way I got the news of the world and could pass the information on.

In October, I had pneumonia that lasted a long time. Sometimes we did not have any medications (aspirin, kalmopyrin, bandages, etc.) which were distributed by the camp commander for use in the hospital.

In November, the cattle cars arrived and took us to our new camp in Ravensbrück and was the largest women's camp in Germany.As newcomers, we were taken to a big tent. The previously arrived were in barracks already. We were told that later when we were registered, counted, etc. barracks would be assigned to us. Before we got our barracks lots of women died from our group. My sister-in-law's daughter and 2 cousins of mine plus childhood friends! We had to stand Appel (counting) every day for hours. We mostly

had only rags on. It was bitter cold, as Ravensbrueck was near the ocean. (If I remember well it was the North Sea or East Sea.) In Ravensbrueck I also worked as an interpreter taking the comrades who were sick and wanted to go to the hospital. (I usually tried to persuade them *not* to go because they will not get any treatment there rather they will become guinea pigs.) I was often called to the office of the chief medical officer, Dr. Treite. In his office there were crates full with Hungarian medicines. Before I got married I was working in a big pharmacy in my native town so I easily could identify the medications, ointments, but there were lots of physician-prescribed medications which were therefore unusable.

In January 1945, was a so-called "General Appel"-the counting was on from early morning until dark. When it was finally over, the woman-officers, our guards, told the group I was in, "You stay put, the others back to barracks!" They gave us our marching orders and we marched until we reached a forest. So we stayed there for a few days. (You lose count.) Then finally cattle cars arrived and another voyage was waiting for us. As I found out

years later, talking to those who survived Ravensbrueck that they thought we were taken away to be killed because no news about our destination ever reached the camp.

After a couple of days, we arrived to Mauthausen in Austria. It was night when we disembarked and was told that we would walk to the camp. It was pitch dark, the road windy, rocky and icy. It was a nightmare, not to be forgotten. You could not stop for a minute. When you stopped, the guards shot you. When finally we arrived, it was already early morning and we saw a huge building looming before us. (I said it looked like a scene from a Wagner opera that made my comrades think I became crazy.)

So, we entered into our new camp and suddenly lots of men prisoners were running towards us. They talked to us in different languages, Hungarian also. It was a big event, as we were the first woman transport arriving in this camp. As we later found out from the Hungarian prisoners there was the son of Minister Pres. Kallay, a count Festetich and other well-known names who were before in

the Gestapo prisons, then shipped to Mauthausen. There were prisoners-of-war from Spain (from the Civil War), Yugoslavia, Russian P.O.W.'s from the war, P.O.W.'s from the French Underground (Resistance). E.g. my French friend, Jacqueline, met again here Roger with whom she was in the Resistance. (They got married after the liberation in Paris.) I became again an interpreter because there were French, Belgian, Holland and Hungarian women in the camp.

Our life in Mauthausen was not any different from our previous camps. As usual, early morning Zehlappell (counting) *for hours*, then finally we could go back to our barracks.

There we exchanged news, some of them good, some of them not so good. One of the men prisoners had a radio. This way we knew about the Jalta conference, Roosevelt's death, the war in Russia, etc. As we were hungry, we were talking about food; exchanging ethnic recipes. Especially the French were good at telling their

different delicacies. We had to keep the recipes in our head, as we did not have any paper and pencils.

Our other distraction was the lice control! We were looking at each other's head (and clothing) very carefully-with special combs; anyway, we all had lice and knew if the Aufseherin (lady officer) will see lice in our short hair, the head will be immediately shaved.

One day, to our big surprise, we saw again the infamous Irma Greese. She was a beautiful German woman-officer, with a whip always in her hand that she used all the time. Here she was the Officer of the Gypsy Camp. There were the famous (I do not recall anymore how many stairs) leading to the Gypsy Camp.

During the winter months, the stairs were frozen with ice and lots of Haftlinge (as prisoners were called) fell to their death from those stairs. Prisoners had to carry large boulders up the stairs. They had to walk very close together (like dominoes). If one prisoner lost his footing, almost all the people behind him would fall. As they walked up the stairs, they were laughed at, whipped.

No one had proper rest, clothing, shoes and food to handle such steep steps.

In April, we heard the good news that the International Red Cross will come to the camp and will repatriate to Switzerland the French, Belgian, Holland prisoners. Soon the news became a reality; white buses with the Red Cross on their sides arrived in the camp.

My 2 good friends from Ravensbrueck Jacqueline (French) and Betty (Belgian) begged me to go with their transport. With my French-speaking ability nobody would notice that I was Hungarian, but I stayed at the camp with the small Hungarian group. We said our tearful good-byes and the buses left the camp.

A few days later, our guards told us that the American troops are not too far and we will leave for another camp, but only those who can march will be taken away. Who is sick and/or weak will stay in the camp. I had my second bout of pneumonia and was left behind with the other sick people.

After the evacuation, it was May 4th or 5th 1945, the American troops arrived, but there was no cheering or happiness. We could hardly believe it that we were free. The American soldiers started to take pictures of us and the camp, saying it was unbelievable what they found here.

We got lots of food, medication and care. Sorry to say that lots of people died after the liberation, as they could not resist the plenty of foods they saw and ate.

As I spoke English, I was again the interpreter, but not for too long as I got typhoid (Flecktyphus) and was taken into quarantine. I was terribly sick. I do not remember how long I was there. I only remember when they brought in new skeletons and took out the dead skeletons. By the end of June, I already could walk a little. The camp was almost empty because the different eastern countries sent buses for their people, but not the Hungarians.

As we were told that we could travel at no charge on the Austrian trains, our small Hungarian group traveled from Mauthausen to

Vienna and from there to Hungary, but it was a long, exhausting journey, as I was still very weak and sick.

Finally, I arrived to Ujpest, went to my sister-in-laws apartment who did not recognize me at first. She nourished me back to health.

When my husband, Miklos (from camp Oranienburg and Sachsenhausen), arrived in August 1945, I was almost recognizable. After years of separation, we were together again to reconstruct our interrupted lives.

This is my story.

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